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## Lansing emergency leader offers step-by-step directives

By Tom Lambert  
Lansing State Journal

• Disaster scenario: A fuel truck is struck by a train on Michigan Avenue on a hot July night. The harmful vapors are spreading quickly into neighboring areas.

Ken Jones, Lansing's emergency manager director, explains what city officials would do if this scenario became reality.

• Jones: First, warning sirens would be activated. A siren means "go indoors" and tune to the radio or TV for further instruction. Residents in the danger area would be warned by fire and police on the scene.

The Emergency Operations Center would be activated and staffed by the mayor, department heads, hospital representatives, American Red Cross, transportation engineers, public service supervisors and many other knowledgeable staff.

The on-scene commanders will determine the critical priorities: evacuate or stay inside. The EOC will support the local commanders and coordinate the overall event.

The EOC will coordinate messages to radio and TV to inform citizens of the current situation and what they should do.

Traffic engineers staff the EOC and will plan the best route to take residents away from the danger.

Public service workers will place barricades at strategic locations. Police will coordinate traffic flow away from the accident and keep unsuspecting travelers from entering the danger zone. Each of these critical tasks are determined for the hazardous situation, no matter where it might occur.

It is necessary to keep the plan flexible so it can be adapted to any situation and any location.

### On the Web

Check these Web sites for information about preparing your family for emergencies:

- Ingham County Sheriff's Office: [www.ingham.org](http://www.ingham.org)
- Michigan State Police Emergency Management: [www.michigan.gov/msp](http://www.michigan.gov/msp)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)
- American Red Cross: [midmichigan.redcross.org](http://midmichigan.redcross.org)
- Federal Department of Homeland Security: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

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## Ready or not for disaster?

Local plans shaped by emergencies most likely to occur

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Water so deep that boats replaced cars and street signs were barely visible. Residents fled with all they could carry to higher ground. Thousands of homes were damaged.

The Gulf Coast after hurricanes Katrina or Rita?

No. Lansing in 1975.

It's the type of disaster that has shaped emergency planning in mid-Michigan.

Local preparedness focuses first on disasters that affect parts of towns or neighborhoods. In Lansing, for example, there is no city-wide evacuation plan.

"Chances are the disasters that could happen here wouldn't require us to have everybody leave," said Ken Jones, Lansing's emergency management director. "Rather than plan for far-fetched things that probably won't happen, we plan for the most likely disasters that could hit here."



(Photo by Lansing State Journal file photo)

Trees down: An ice storm in March 1997 caused many downed limbs - and even whole trees - as Mary Wojcik and her neighbor Don Womboldt encountered on Foster Street. The storm led to widespread blackouts in mid-Michigan, a disaster for which local officials plan as part of their emergency preparedness strategies.

### POSSIBLE HAZARDS

A sampling of hazards for which Lansing officials prepare:

#### Technological

Hazardous material incident, transportation — An uncontrolled release of hazardous materials during transport capable of posing a risk to life, health, safety, property or the environment

Pipeline incidents — A significant uncontrolled release of petroleum or natural gas from a pipeline, capable of posing a risk to life, health, safety, property or the environment

Dam failure — The collapse or failure of an impoundment, resulting in downstream flooding

Civil disturbances — A public demonstration or gathering or prison uprising that results in a disruption of essential functions, rioting, looting, arson or other unlawful behavior

Terrorism: An intentional, unlawful use of force, violence or subversion against persons or property to intimidate or

The disasters most likely to cause the worst damage in mid-Michigan include blizzards, ice storms and severe floods - such as the torrential downpours that hit Lansing in April 1975.

In that spring, a combination of winter melt and heavy rains caused the Grand River to overflow its banks and devastate entire neighborhoods.

Those kinds of emergencies prompt communities to turn to experts like private consultant Mike Fagel of Aurora, Ill., who helps cities, states, businesses and universities with their emergency planning.

"Communities have to ask themselves 'What's our risk? What's our profile?' " Fagel said.

### Educate the public

Much of the local effort in preparing for a disaster relies on educating the public before a disaster hits.

"We want a disaster- resilient community," said Jones, who added that the more people know, the more likely they are to stay calm.

As part of that effort, emergency management officials from around the area plan a meeting for 6 p.m. Friday to discuss how the area's emergency management system would operate during a crisis. The event will be held at Lansing Community College's Dart Auditorium.

In the event of a disaster, about 20 sirens are set up around Lansing that would alert people who are outside if a disaster has struck or is coming.

"People should then go inside and check their television or radio for further instructions on what they should do," Jones said.

In case of a power outage, emergency officials currently are working on a plan to get information out, Jones said. That plan will include having information distribution points within each of the city's nine fire stations, he added.

"It would be a way for us to give out information to neighborhood leaders who could take that back to their areas," Jones said.

The city also is in the process of using a portion of a recent \$535,000 homeland security grant to buy handheld radio equipment so the city will have a communications link during such an outage.

'You just never know'

coerce a government and the civilian population

Nuclear attack — Any event involving the detonation of a nuclear device, resulting in an unrestrained fission reaction

Natural

Severe wind — wind of 58 mph or greater

Tornadoes, ice storms, snowstorms, extreme cold, extreme heat

Source: City of Lansing

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In May 2002, one mid-Michigan town faced a disaster that forced a city-wide response.

About 2,200 residents had to evacuate when a train with chemicals and gas on board derailed in Pottersville, about 20 miles southwest of Lansing. The city remained vacant for five days as officials continued to test the air to make sure it was safe for residents.

Maureen Bird, 29, who works at Joe's Gizzard City, a downtown bar and restaurant in Pottersville, said residents learned from that disaster.

"It's made us more aware; that's for sure," Bird said. "The world works in mysterious ways; you just never know if you are going to be hit by a natural disaster, terrorism or something that happens accidentally."

Being aware is key, Lansing's Jones said. Besides natural or man-made disasters, his office is aware of the terror threat Lansing faces because it houses the state Capitol and many essential state functions.

"And when it comes to those unpredictable things, we would probably notify people to stay home," he said.

### **Private measures**

Bo Mitchell, a private consultant who specializes in protecting corporations, schools and medical facilities against emergencies of all types, said all businesses are federally required to have an evacuation plan.

But in his experience, few do. Of the 245 businesses he's assisted since his firm opened nearly five years ago, only seven had some sort of evacuation plan in place.

"I tell all the places I help, you are on your own during a disaster," said Mitchell, who started 911 Consulting, based in Wilton, Conn. "It's impossible for somebody to help you during one because there's a total lack of communication."

Accident Fund Insurance Co. of America in Lansing is a company that Jones is helping with its emergency planning.

"We wanted to be proactive," said Bob Metzger, spokesman of the Accident Fund, which has about 480 employees in its downtown building. "The more planning you can put in on the front end, the more successful that plan will be if you have to carry it out."

Businesses should update their evacuation plans with their employees at least once a year, Mitchell said.

"You could be on your own for only five minutes or for five days," he said. "You just never know, but you have to have a plan."

Contact Tom Lambert at 377-1063 or [tlambert@lsj.com](mailto:tlambert@lsj.com).